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BUILDING FOUNDATION ON SAND: CERTIFIED TEFL TEACHERS' SHIFTING IDENTITY THROUGH PRACTICE

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Abstract

The contemporary research on the development of teachers' professional learning and professional identity for a large section of teachers in English as a foreign language (EFL) is woefully underdeveloped. Where previous research focuses on traditionally trained teachers, this project works with teachers trained and certified by private language schools. It examines their perception of development in learning and identity through the lens of Lave and Wenger's theories on professional learning and identity. The data comes from three in-depth interviews from a pilot project of a larger doctoral research project. The primary research questions are: (1) How do non-traditionally trained EFL teachers construct their professional identity? And (2) How do such teachers construct their professional development? The findings push back against and add nuance to the current framework for the development of learning and identity through practice as this teaching population come to and stay in teaching for reasons different yet related to their traditionally trained counterparts.

Keywords

teaching English as a foreign language, native English teacher, teacher identity, professional development, situated learning

Introduction

With an estimated 1.6 billion speakers worldwide, English has situated itself as a global language. It is spoken on all continents and in many countries either in an official or unofficial capacity. It is the number one foreign language taught in schools and dominates as a lingua franca in the realm of politics and commerce (Crystal, 2012). In Europe, English is the most widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the EU member states where English is an official language. At 38 percent, English is by a wide margin the number one foreign language in which Europeans can hold a conversation (Eurobarometer, 2012).

As a result, non-traditional Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) training and certification programs have become global industries. In 2012, it was estimated that the English language learning market was worth more than 63 billion USD (Global Silicon Valley Advisors, 2012). To meet the demand of about 265,000 teachers (Hoare, 2010), English speakers pursue a month-long TEFL certification in order work abroad in, at least according to one recruiting agency's directory, 66,000 English language schools world-wide ("English Language Schools Directory," (n.d). One of the most popular certification programs, the Cambridge-backed Certificate in English Language Teaching for Adults (CELTA), is often considered the gold standard. With a more than 50-year history, it has been estimated that the CELTA program is offered at 286 sites in 54 countries and, as a result, provides 900 courses graduating 10,000 teachers every year (Green, 2005). That estimate does not include the countless other TEFL training programs in universities and online around the world.

In the surging efforts to meet such high demand, the TEFL industry has encountered several critical issues in training, recruiting, and retaining teachers. For one, mobility and attrition rates are incredibly high. One teacher recruitment agency estimates that 50 percent of teachers remain at their school for a second year and drops to 10 percent in the third year while between 30 and 35 percent leave the field after one year ("How large is the job market for English teachers abroad?" n.d). Second, TEFL pre-service and in-service training is notoriously inconsistent. TEFL training programs can range from a 100-hour online certification course to a traditional four-year or even a master's degree, thus resulting in variations in quality. In fact, it is not uncommon for many schools to be both a training center and an in-house recruitment center (Hobbs, 2013).

Despite hurdles, there have been calls for improvement from within the profession. Many have argued for increased professional standards including increased regulation for certification, improved pre-service and in-service training, increased accountability, and better recruiting practices to battle high attrition rates and improve perception and professionalization (Maley, 1992; Roger, 2010).

While there are calls for improvement within the industry, the details thereof remain largely vague particularly with regard to teacher education. This paper is the result of a pilot project as part of a larger dissertation that hopes to confront issues of attrition by constructing research questions that focus on the processes in which (1) non-traditionally trained EFL teachers construct their professional identity and (2) how they construct their professional development. Specifically, this paper discusses the shifting notions of professional identity and development as shaped by the practice of teachers dedicated to or considering TEFL abroad as a permanent career. Through the lens of Lave and Wenger's research on learning and identity, these questions are taken in tandem as identity and development work hand in hand.

Situated Learning: A Theoretical Lens for Identity and Development

The formation of a teacher's professional identity is an inherently social task. It is through social relationships that individuals begin to know themselves. Danielewicz (2014) illustrates this point with a case study of students participating in a class designed specifically for developing teacher identity. She found that a teacher's sense of self is developed through a dialectic of identification. Identity is formed through "self-definition and definition by others, both of which are necessary" (Danielewicz, 2014, p. 39). In a similar study, Alsup (2006) viewed identity development through the lens of discourse; through competing discourses, both culturally and individually constructed, teachers develop their own sense of self. Furthermore, for both Danielewicz and Alsup, identify formation is not a singular event, it is an evolution. There is no endpoint to identity formation, it is a continual process.

With regards to the development of identity and practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a useful lens with *communities of practice*, *learning-in-practice*, and *identities-in-practice*. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Wenger (1998) provided three dimensions of practice that give shape to a community of practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Participants give definition to these dimensions through mutual negotiation of meaning through their shared practice that gives shape to not only the community's practice but the very identity of the community and the individuals themselves. Such groups can be professional, such as tailors and midwifes, or social, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, but all share a common passion: to participate regularly and build communities to share their passion and knowledge. Sharing the social nature of identify formation,

newcomers learn and develop as part of this community through acceptance and interaction with established and experienced practitioners to better themselves and their own standing within the community. By learning-in-practice, Lave (1996) meant that the social practice becomes the cornerstone for learning. In the same manner, novice practitioners are not simply developing a new set of skills, but also their own sense of identity within the community vis-à-vis identity-in-practice. A tailor's apprentice is not simply learning to sew but *learning to become* a tailor.

Together, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the concept of situated learning with its central defining characteristic of *legitimate peripheral participation* within a community of practice. Lave and Wenger argued that any career or profession is home to a community of practitioners made up of *newcomers* (novices) and *old-timers* (experienced practitioners). Legitimate peripheral participation provides a framework to understand the emerging identity of newcomers through the development of knowledge and skills with the interaction among themselves as well as with seasoned professionals within a given career or profession. As Lave and Wenger (1991) noted:

> It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community-of-practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (p. 29)

Legitimate peripheral participation provides a space for increasing participation for individuals new to a community that shapes both their identity and their knowledge and skill set in a manner that is beneficial to both novices and their experienced guides. Mentors can bring novices into the fold with guided practices with increasing complexity and autonomy and novices keep the knowledge and skills of their mentors as well as the profession alive. It is through this practice with their novice peers and experienced mentors that individual newcomers can engage in learning as well as develop an identity.

Becoming an English Teacher: Previous Research in TEFL on Identity Development

There have been a few studies of language teachers viewed through the lens of situated learning. In the aptly named "Do EFL Teachers Have Careers," Johnston (1997) questioned the use of the terms "career" and "profession" with regards to TEFL given how little is known about the working lives of

its teachers compared to those of traditionally trained teachers with careers in conventional schools and classrooms. Johnston raised several problematic findings: teachers often presented their entry into ELT as accidental or secondary rather than purposeful, leaving was always present in their accounts, they always drew on identities alternative to that of "teacher," and both the notion of vocation and the discourse of professionalism was absent. In short, teaching was seen more as a day-to-day job, one that could be left at any time, rather than a profession with a long-term career path.

In 2004, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) conducted an ethnographic study following a group of American bilingual teachers participating in a professional development initiative for bilingual programs. Situated learning posits that learning is an identification process as learning is "an evolving form of membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53); newcomers learn as they become increasingly active within a particular community. Varghese et al. (2005) found the concept of situated learning particularly helpful as these bilingual teachers had varying levels of participation following the program; some took their role beyond the classroom as advocates, some were firm in their role solely as classroom teachers, and others left the profession altogether.

Kanno and Stuart (2011) employed situated learning as a means to understand the identity formation of two master's students at a TESOL program in a U.S. university. In their view, Lave and Wenger's concepts of learning-in-practice and identities-in-practice are of particular importance. Kanno and Stuart (2011) expanded upon these concepts of teacher identity development by differentiating between role and identity, stating, "Role is a public function often assigned externally, whereas identity involves inner commitment" (p. 239). In other words, role is an imposed set of expected behavior, while identity is an internally adopted and dedicated sense of self. For the authors, the process of becoming a teacher is one of identity transformation. With this distinction in mind, Kanno and Stuart observed that their student teacher participants found it particularly difficult to identify as teachers and viewed it more as a role. Essentially, they were playing a part. However, a year of extended and daily practice made them more competent in the more fundamental and day-to-day aspects of teaching so that they could then shift their focus onto the more abstract aspects that would define their teaching and themselves as teachers. They could then more readily identify as teachers.

Lave and Wenger's framework provides an interesting lens to view the development of identity of EFL teachers abroad through praxis. All teachers, to some degree, learn "on the job," but it may be more characteristic of non-traditionally trained EFL teachers compared to traditionally trained colleagues given the truncated pre-service training of even the most highly regarded TEFL training and certification programs. That said, it is more than a little

obvious to say that the development of these teachers is largely shaped by their experiences in schools abroad. What is less obvious are the defining features of an often overlooked but very large, diverse, and unique teaching community.

Data Collection and Methodology

The present research is a pilot project that acted as a spring board for a larger dissertation project of qualitative research on the professional lives of non-traditionally trained and certified English speakers who move abroad from a native-English-speaking country in order to teach the language in the Czech Republic. The primary research questions for the overall project are: (1) How do certified EFL teachers construct their professional identity? And (2) How do certified EFL Teachers construct their professional development? With a focus on narrated stories of their life as a teacher, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three EFL teachers. Interviewees were asked about their motivations to enter and remain in English language teaching in ways both general and specific; their relationship with teaching and views on the profession and themselves as professionals; as well as questions concerning their initial training and certification and ongoing training and further education.

The interviews were conducted in person and via Skype, recorded and transcribed, and then coded deductively and analyzed following thematic analysis. Specifically, the themes of evolving motivation and professional identity through practice were analyzed in order to develop an understanding of the manner in which teachers shape their professional development and sense of self as EFL teachers. All personal information has been removed for use in this publication and their identities have been protected with pseudonyms. Copies of the recorded interviews and their accompanying transcripts were kept in a secure location and will be disposed of by the researcher after the conclusion of the broader research project. As a pilot project, the number of participants will be expanded and the research design and interview questions will be revisited and revised if necessary.

Participants

As the research focuses on teacher retention, effort was made to find participants past their second year of teaching, where the vast majority of novices drop out, and who are dedicated or open to remaining as EFL teachers. At the time of data collection, one teacher had taught for six and half years, the second for four and half, and the third for two years. Each individual comes from a fairly unique educational background outside of education,

though all three come from a liberal arts background. Furthermore, they teach in vastly different contexts. One participant teaches in a private company for adults, another in private grade school, and the third works for a private company where he travels to provide a week of lessons in various elementary schools. All are based out of Prague, Czech Republic.

Table 1
Participant teaching demographics

Teacher	School or Private Company	Length of ELT Experience	Length of ELT Experience in Czech Republic
Isaac	Private Company	6.5	2
Andrew	Private School	4.5	2
Nelson	Private Company contracts with public schools	2	2

Findings

Pre-service and In-service Training and Certification: A Foundation to Build On
The participants, while at times critical, were generally positive about the professional development they had received. For pre-service, the participants spoke favorably about the hands-on aspects of the training, such as mentoring and student teaching under guidance. However, due to the short timeline there were some common areas that were overemphasized, such as lesson planning, to the detriment of other areas with less coverage, such as formal grammatical structures. On the whole, however, their various pre-service training provided a workable foundation to build upon. As Isaac stated:

> *Was it enough? I think so. It was certainly enough to get started. Of course, there in my first few weeks, starting off there in Russia, yeah, I had some trouble, but I at least had a solid foundation that I could branch off of and build upon. So, there was that. That was a good aspect.*

Pre-service TEFL training is enough for an effective introduction, but it is by no means a complete overview of everything the individual TEFL teacher can or even should know. However, the ideal pre-service program for any subject area is rare if not impossible, hence the need for ongoing, in-service training.

There was less consensus among these participants concerning current and future in-service needs other than a general openness to further education or additional certification. There could be many reasons for this lack of agreement. For one, the certified TEFL pre-service training described was generally similar in terms of structure, subject matter, and methodology and the common experience seems to have produced relatively common

reflections. However, the participants' in-service needs seemed to be very disparate, likely resulting from the differences in their past experiences as well as current teaching situations. Both Andrew and Isaac have worked for language schools or companies that regularly provided additional training sessions while Nelson reported no such opportunities provided by his employer. A critical reading of Wenger's communities of practice may provide some insight into this situation.

Cliques of Newcomers and Old-timers: A Breakdown of an Authentic Community-of-practice

For Wenger (1998), communities of practice are the spaces where newcomers can make the theoretical practical through collaboration and experimentation with peers and mentors. It is part of the induction process where newcomers can learn from the expertise of old-timers as well as collaborate with their novice peers. However, practically speaking, there is often a breakdown in this induction process in TEFL. Newcomers and old-timers may tend to segregate themselves, upending the induction process. Isaac noticed this when talking about his newcomer peers, which he called *TEFLers*:

> *Since I tend to see them a lot more now with proximity to being in the office all the time. Like, I can always see them because they are the ones that are there in the library or teachers room until 8 or 9 o'clock at night and they have stacks of paper that they are filling out. They're lesson planning broken down into a 9x9 grid or 3x3 grid or something. So, just kind of seeing them as they are asking each other, like, giving each other bad advice, but they're not comfortable enough to ask the other teachers and the senior teachers, but they want to ask each other. It's fun to kind of watch them, kind of struggle through it.*

Isaac is a little facetious in recounting his experience with newcomers, but he points to an important issue regarding communities of practice in international language schools. It is important for new teachers to find a space to work and experiment with one another, but when done in such a segregated manner it can create a cycle of bad practice. Mentorship from experienced teachers is an important aspect in building a community of practice. While Isaac later shared stories of personally inviting newcomers or the administration directing them to his classroom, it seems to be a loose, ad hoc system of guidance rather than a system cultivated with intent. Furthermore, the responsibility is placed upon the newcomers rather than a shared responsibility between newcomers and old-timers. This can create an isolating and fragmented experience for both newcomer and old-timer EFL teachers, producing a poor reflection of a community of practice.

While dedicated EFL teachers seem to have a general idea of the necessary trajectory for their ideal TEFL profession, they are limited in transforming

that idea into reality. They are handicapped by the absence of a real and enduring community of practice in either their training experiences or working environments. It is possible that isolation is ingrained by the nomadic tendencies of EFL teachers who never really become part of a community either at the school or larger professional level. Creating an intentional community of practice seems, at the very least, incredibly difficult. Nevertheless, it is not impossible for non-traditional EFL teachers to develop their skills in teaching and themselves as teachers. The route taken is simply one less well traveled and one often left to the individual rather than one laid out by the TEFL field.

Developing Teacher Identity: From Job to Career

Given the breakdown of an authentic community of practice and the stability it can provide, it is perhaps unsurprising that two of the participants did not anticipate teaching at all, let alone consider ELT a possible lifelong career. The perception is that teaching English abroad is something to do for a gap year as a way to see the world and perhaps save some money along the way. As Isaac stated, many of his peers fell into teaching due the opportunities and circumstances related to being a native speaker, but derive no joy from teaching:

> *Some of the teachers I do know, they sort of got into it because "Oh, yes, I don't have any other skill, but I do speak English. Oh, yeah, I just want to travel around." But they absolutely hate the teaching aspect of it.*

The common perception aligns to Johnston's findings (1997) as well as those of Kanno and Stuart (2011) where teaching English abroad is a role to play rather than part of a professional identity because of the primary motivation stems from the lifestyle it allots rather than teaching itself. Andrew succinctly stated what brought him to teaching English abroad:

> *I basically was teaching because it afforded me the opportunity to travel and I love going to other cultures and studying about other cultures. It's kind of my passion. I would say that's more my passion than teaching itself. But I love teaching too. I really do enjoy teaching.*

Andrew plainly stated that travel is the primary factor in pursuing teaching English abroad. He, too, fell into teaching because it allotted him certain extrinsic benefits. However, unlike Isaac's characterization of his peers, Andrew stated, as the other participants did, that he thoroughly enjoys the act of teaching. This poses a question: if both temporary and career English teachers abroad enter under similar circumstances, how do those who remain construct their identity as teachers? How do they shift from seeing teaching as a temporary role to teacher as part of their identity?

Retention: The Desire to Continue to Teach

Similar as in Johnston's research (1997) in Poland, the participants had not anticipated teaching English abroad for as long as they had. They constantly reflected on the proposition of leaving TEFL or, at least, returning home to teach. However, while Johnston found teachers ruminating on the future prospect of leaving the field, the participant teachers in this research focused more on the fact that they had not left yet. Additionally, there were hints of ELT abroad being something one could float in and out of over time. For example, Isaac took a two-year hiatus from teaching English abroad after a three-year stint. He characterized this time back in the U.S. as "*a nice little break*," which seems to imply it was always his intention to return to TEFL. It also may imply that he may take another nice little break from the field in the future.

While the shared perception is that English teachers rarely consider the job as a lifelong career at the outset, the more they come to think about their current and future prospects the longer teachers stay within EFL. Specifically, coming to a crossroad is a common theme where there comes a time to decide whether they wish to make EFL a lifelong pursuit. This is obviously not a light decision. If one chooses to remain, they are making a commitment to ELT for the foreseeable future. For example, after teaching for several years in Asia, Andrew came to the Czech Republic with a definite timeline for exiting the field. His intention was to make this experience his last foray into TEFL abroad:

> *Teaching? Well, I would say that when I came here to the Czech Republic, I thought I would do two more years. I told myself I would do two more years and then I would do something else. I basically was teaching because it afforded me the opportunity to travel.*

For Andrew, TEFL was not viewed as a possible long-term career even after several years of teaching. Andrew's perception reflects the commonly held notion shared by all participants in one form or another that TEFL is a temporary job that subsidizes travel, provides the opportunities for new cultural experiences, and can save a bit of money for the future. In the end, many in ELT abroad will return home to pursue a real career. The irony for some of these teachers is that TEFL is never really considered a career until it actually is. Teachers find themselves, almost suddenly, making a life-altering decision to commit to TEFL.

Transition From TEFL Job to TEFL Profession

When individuals commit to TEFL, they begin to broaden their gaze. They view ELT in a different light and openly develop their identity as professional EFL teachers. Their view of ELT shifts from a temporary position with the

benefit of travel to a teaching profession and possible career they can dedicate themselves to and invest in. As a caveat, however, travel appears to remain important as a motivating factor, it is simply not as important. As Nelson illustrated:

> *Well, you know, when I started I guess I looked at it as a job. I looked at it as a means to travel and, you know, I'll be honest, I get a little self-conscious sometimes because a lot of my friends and colleagues are people who have studied for years to do what I do and, you know, for them it is a profession. It's something that they've dedicated their lives to. They went to school for it. For me, I kind of feel like I just fell into it. That said, the longer I do it, the more I do feel like a teacher. I don't … You know, if I really do something I want to be good at it. I don't want to half ass it. … I started out thinking of this as a job and the longer I do it the more I want to be better at what I do.*

Nelson explicitly exhibited Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of identity-in-practice. He initially felt as if he fell into teaching and as such he compared himself negatively to some of his more experienced peers. However, as he stated, the longer he teaches and the more he interacts with the community of EFL teachers abroad, the more he feels like a teacher and strives to be better.

The participants' realization of TEFL as a profession and themselves as professionals provides some answers to Johnston's questions on ELT as a career for individuals and the broader question here of ELT as a profession for the field. For these participants, TEFL is definitely a profession and there are certain markers of legitimacy that separate a job from a career. For some, a profession is legitimized by its association with a dedicated field of science, professional organizations, or a societal need. For others, legitimacy does not just come from outside of the field, but also stems from within the individual. One explicit example given is the individual's personal investment, as Nelson explained:

> *When you said that: time and effort. Well, there you go. You know a profession is something that you do for, typically, income. You know, you want to eat and live and, in any profession, you have to invest time and energy. And I think TEFL teachers, not all of them, but many of them do invest in those things: time and effort. If you're one hundred percent in, and you care about what you do, and you want to be better at what you do, I think that it would make that a profession in my opinion.*

Nelson succinctly and astutely provided a definition of profession in line with the research. Of course, a profession provides the means to live and, specifically in the case of TEFL, a means to a certain kind of lifestyle. However, a profession does not just invest in the individual, as illustrated by a salary in this case. Rather, a profession also involves the individual making an investment through time and energy both in the profession itself as well

as in themselves as a professional. In this manner, a profession is commitment and investment personified.

A Career Decision: The Transitioning to TEFL Professional

A career is an investment. It is an investment of time, energy, and resources. Furthermore, individuals not only invest themselves in a career, they also invest in themselves for a career. Conversely, a career often invests in the individual through initial as well as on-going professional development. As made obvious in the marketing of recruitment agencies and the critiques thereof, however, teaching English abroad has not and does not present itself as a career. Thus, teachers are often surprised by their decision to pursue TEFL for the long term. As such, teachers must reevaluate their entire trajectory and, as with designing any career trajectory, make plans to meet these goals by investing in their own future. Each participant mentioned furthering their education in some fashion:

> Isaac: *I will probably go for a master's. I might go for my CELTA or even a DELTA. ... Certainly, a couple more conferences as that's going to be developing for myself.*
>
> Nelson: *Yeah, I guess my ten-year plan is you know… I think, I think I'll continue my education. If I want to continue being a teacher, then I have to continue my education. So, what I do now works in the Czech Republic. It works in other parts of the world where they just need to be a native speaker and anything on top of that is a bonus. But I don't want to limit myself to the Czech Republic. So, you know, if I want to teach in the US or other parts of the world, I'm going to need a little bit more. I'm going to need experience and I'm going to need academic experience.*

For these participants, this means the prospect of additional TEFL certifications such as CELTA or DELTA or formal education and higher degrees. In the case of Andrew, when he began teaching at an elementary school in the Czech Republic, he was met with a supportive administration that saw potential and pushed him to consider teaching as a career. To do so, his principal suggested the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), a common two-year higher education course for teachers in the UK and common in international schools, to further his education and aid his career:

> *And so, he said, "What you can do is go for this PGCE. You can actually take it internationally if you want to do it." So, yeah, it was a big thing. I took quite a long time. I thought a lot about it. ... I just really took my time with and saying all that I was still uncertain whether or not I wanted to do it because if I was going to do it I was, like, "Right, then, this is it. I'm going to make this a career and I'm going to do it." And I that's what I've decided to do.*

It's important to underscore the point that TEFL is not considered a career until it is. Andrew's administrator saw him as a career teacher before even he did, and the advanced certification marked the turning point where TEFL shifted from temporary job to lifelong career. A postgraduate degree is a sizeable investment and for Andrew this meant crossing the Rubicon and embracing life as an EFL teacher. It is clear that this decision was not made hastily or flippantly; he thought about it for months and was still undecided. In the end, however, Andrew committed, adjusted his plans accordingly, and made the investment in his profession.

Discussion

Similar as in the Johnston's research on English teachers in Poland (Johnston, 1997), TEFL was not originally viewed as a lifelong pursuit for these teachers in Prague. However, somewhere along the line these teachers have decided to make EFL a career, or at least are open to the idea at the moment. However, dedication alone does not turn individuals into teachers; they must work to develop their knowledge and skills as well. They cannot just plan for the immediate future as they would on holiday or even the working holiday they originally envisioned. They must plan for their short-term as well as the long-term future. They must consider the TEFL professional they wish to become and construct a professional development road map of further education, certification, and training to bridge the divide from their current selves to their future, ideal selves. After such a transition, the participants' perceptions of their career trajectory differs greatly from that in Johnston's research and is more in line with the research on traditionally trained EFL teachers.

For Lave and Wenger (1991) as well as related researchers of situated learning, teachers build acute knowledge and skills tailored to their career through a social process where novices receive knowledge and experience from those who came before in order to share it with those who come after. For teachers entering the profession through traditional avenues, these communities of practice are often ready-made through the university experience with student teaching, mentorships, and intentionally constructed feedback systems. However, TEFL training and certification relies on truncated timelines that essentially shift the development process from the introduction and induction stages of teacher education to the in-service stage. However, that in-service development takes place in an ad hoc, fractured, or arbitrary way rather than in a structured, institutionalized manner. As Wenger (1998) elaborated with his discussion of communities of practice, neither sharing a community nor sharing practice alone gives rise to

a community of practice. A community of practice is one with at least a relative intention to build a community of shared practice in order to progress both the community and its practice. In EFL abroad, the connections often appear too loose if present at all due to isolation, the development of teacher cliques, and the relatively short teaching span and high attrition rate of the common EFL teacher abroad.

Despite differences, there are aspects of the development of EFL teachers where Lave and Wenger (1991) appear accurate, specifically with regards to EFL teachers constructing their professional identity. Consider the moment when these individuals decide to dedicate themselves to TEFL as a career. This marks a pivotal time in their lives as teachers as they begin to develop their own notion of professional identity through the very practice itself. They then start to plot the trajectory of their own professional development. But this constructive transition is not a singular act but is a constant process active throughout their tenure as a professional TEFL teacher. Moreover, these notions are constantly shifting and evolving through their expanding experiences and interactions as teachers.

However, Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideal process is not fully realized for non-traditionally trained EFL teachers. This is most apparent with EFL teachers' individual attempts to construct their professional development due to the lack of a true community of practice. While EFL teachers seem to be highly reflective of their own experience, ELT is perceived as fairly isolated for many and lacks cooperative practice and mentoring. Cliques of newcomers or old-timers may arise within language schools, while some teachers are completely isolated by traveling between sites or even between cities. Newcomers may be misinforming one another and creating bad habits; old-timers become entrenched in their own ways; and isolated teachers become secluded and left to their own devices.

Conclusion

While non-traditionally trained EFL teachers seem to develop their identity as teachers through practice, the community of practice for these EFL teachers can look very different than that put forth by Wenger (1998) and, as such, has an effect on their professional development. However, the study at hand only hints at some of the factors at play. As such, there are a number of areas for further research. For one, travel seems to be a unifying theme that brought these participants to teaching, but the findings from other research suggests various other factors (Mullock, 2009). This could provide an interesting avenue for further research within the realm of teacher motivation, largely focused on intrinsic and altruistic motivations for teachers entering into

and remaining in the teaching profession. Second, while situated learning provides an interesting lens for identity development, more research needs to be done to more clearly illustrate any trends in either the development of professional identity or professional ability. The research at hand is constrained by having too few participants with disparate experiences. This provides a varied and interesting view, though one too limited to come to any concrete conclusions other than a critique of Wenger's community of practice for much of the TEFL community. Thankfully, this pilot study is giving way to an expanded study of 12 participants with a greater degree of ELT experience in both length and breadth.

In the end, however, we see glimpses of a cycle of building professional identity and professional development similar to yet distinct from previous research on the subject. Much of the research in these areas focuses on teachers from a traditionally trained background. Similar to Johnston's findings, the participants in this research did not initially choose teaching as a life-long career; some participants in this research project still have not come to that final decision. As such, these participants are building their professional identity in a much more haphazard or ad hoc manner as opposed to their traditionally trained peers, who are often guided through introduction and induction in an institutionalized way. The same can be said for their professional development, where in-service training is largely left to the individual company or school where the quality varies from place to place if present at all. In the end, however, these EFL teachers appear to hold themselves to a high standard with expectations to meet it. While these participants may have "fallen into teaching," they nonetheless feel they are working hard to be professional teachers.

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